

What young people ask me most about RELIGION



by Dr. BILLY GRAHAM
as told to CURTIS MITCHELL

From all over the world have come these questions from youths seeking a creed to live by; here are this noted evangelist's answers

A LETTER CAME to me last Spring during our crusade in Melbourne, Australia, that read:

"There are hundreds of bodgies and widgees in Melbourne with empty lives. Could you hold a special bodgies-and-widgees meeting? I'm sure your message would be of great value to all of us."

It was signed: "A converted bodgie."

In Australian terminology, a bodgie or widge is a teen-aged rebel and nonconformist. I knew that letter spoke for a great many other teen-agers. So I read it one night to my audience and announced I would have a special message for all young people the following Saturday night. To make sure there would be a response, I asked each adult to bring at least one teen-ager.

I shall never forget that Saturday night. Thirty minutes before the meeting, the skies opened in a veritable deluge. On the way to our outdoor stadium, my car was stalled by high water. At the stadium, duckboards had to be installed to serve as bridges between the audience and the platform.

Nevertheless, 45,000 attended and more than 30,000 of them were young people. At the end of the service, more than 2,300—95 percent of them teen-agers—came forward.

Next day, a black headline in the *Melbourne Sun-Herald* proclaimed: "TEEN-AGERS PRAY IN MUD."

This is a growing tide, this youthful concern about religion. Throughout the free world, young people are seeking a creed to believe and a song to sing. Everywhere I go I find it is the young people who are leading the way. And they ask penetrating, personal questions.

One day while I was sunning myself on a beach in Australia, a group of young people gathered around. Presently, they were questioning me. One bronzed youth asked: "Is it possible to be a Christian and have fun?"

Too often young people outside the church have seen only a caricature of true religion, not the vitality that characterizes the enthusiasm of the first disciples.

Let's examine that word "enthusiasm." It comes

from two words: "en" which means in, and "theo" meaning God. Hence, enthusiasm means "God in you." Imagine the enthusiasm of a musician who felt that Beethoven's spirit lived in him, or the artist who believed he possessed Rembrandt's great spirit.

The Apostle Paul felt this enthusiasm when he said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Yes, you can have fun. Joining hands with God can be a thrilling, exciting experience. Thousands of young people I know will back me up.

A girl among the Australian teen-agers asked another question: "If I get religion, will it interfere with my career?"

We live in a practical world, and if our beliefs threaten our means of making a livelihood, we should indeed count the cost. Assuming that you choose a legitimate career, being religious should increase your chance of success, not lessen it. It certainly did not hurt John Wanamaker or J. C. Penney. We must not convey the impression that religion makes one more prosperous, for profits can be spiritual and moral as well as financial. The point is that we should be good stewards of whatever gifts God gives us.

Several years ago, I encountered a young Indian scholar who had studied Marx and Lenin. He demanded: "But can the Bible give me a workable philosophy of life?"

It is the only workable philosophy.

I remember a letter from an ex-Communist who wrote, "During your first visit to England I was among those who opposed you. At that time, I was secretary of the Communist party. I have had a complete change of heart. As chairman of the Crusade Committee for Reading, I will be working as earnestly for you now as I did against you."

I remember the young woman at one of our London meetings several years ago who was at loose ends and a Communist sympathizer. Where the teachings of Marx and Lenin had failed to answer her problems, those of the Holy Bible succeeded. Today she is on our evangelistic team.

Popularity has become an obsession with many young Americans. I encountered it among students at Yale, Princeton, and other universities. Undergraduates usually put it this way: "Billy, won't being converted make me unpopular with the gang?"

I believe that a truly religious way of life is almost certain to increase one's popularity. Here is a letter I received from a youth who called himself a confirmed introvert:

"When I went to hear you preach, I met some fellows who acted as though they had found something, and they weren't smug about it, either. One night I felt an impulse to yield my life to God, which I did. A surprising change came over me. I had a new love and interest for people. At school I began to make friends. My life has taken a new, rich turn."

Two years ago, I heard this from a Mexican teen-ager: "I'm all for religion, but will I still get a kick out of life?"

What kind of kick does one seek? I once had dinner with a man who lived in a 200-room house. He was a music lover, and scattered through his house were 40 pianos. But with all that potential music around him, he couldn't play the piano. His money could not buy the ability to make music.

To me, that is a parable of life. If, in our striving for the material, we fail to find the music in ourselves, we have failed in our chief quest.

But the one question asked by more people in more places than any other is: "Will being a Christian really bring me happiness?"

If, by happiness, a person means good fortune, I offer no encouragement. Righteous people experience poverty, sickness, and tragedy in about the same proportion as others. The Bible says "God sends the rain on the just and the unjust."

But if happiness means blessed, then truly religious persons have a built-in ability to take whatever life offers because they believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Their buoyancy is not an innovation of their own; it is a strength given of God.

Family Weekly

July 5, 1959

LEONARD S. DAVIDOW President and Publisher
WALTER C. DREYFUS Vice-President
PATRICK E. O'ROURKE Advertising Director
Send all advertising communications to
Family Weekly, 153 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.
Address all communications about editorial features to
Family Weekly, 60 E. 56th St., New York 22, N. Y.

Board of Editors

ERNEST V. WEYM Editor-in-Chief
BEN KARTMAN Executive Editor
ROBERT FITZGIBBON Managing Editor
RALPH J. FINCH, JR. Art Director
MELANIE DE PROFIT Food Editor

Jack Ryan, Kevin Brown, Honore Singer, Bob Driscoll,
Jerry Klein; Peer Oppenheimer, Hollywood.

© 1959, FAMILY WEEKLY MAGAZINE, INC., 153 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. All rights reserved.